

THE SINKING OF THE GERMAN SHIPS  
AT SCAPA FLOW.

FROM: O.N.I.

Two copies - Copy No.1.

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OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE  
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THE SINKING OF THE GERMAN SHIPS  
AT SCAPA FLOW.

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From: The Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet.  
Date: June 27, 1919 - No. 395 A.H. - No. 0050.  
To : The Secretary of the Admiralty.

(Copies for: the Commanding Officer of the ships  
at Scapa;  
and for the Rear Admiral commanding  
the Orkney and the Shetland Islands.)

-oOo-

Following the dispatch from the Atlantic Fleet, dated June 22, 1919, No. 371/A.H. 0050, in regard to the scuttling of the German ships at Scapa Flow, on June 21, 1919, I beg to inform the Board that I have received a copy of the report written June 24, No. 506/281, by Vice Admiral Sir Sidney R. Fremantle K.C.B., M. V. O. commanding officer of the ships in the roadstead, and a copy of the report dated June 23, No. 050/91, made by Rear Admiral J. Prendergast, C.B., in command at the Orkney and Shetland Islands, in regard to the circumstances surrounding the event in question. We suggest that the translations of German documents sent with the Vice Admiral's letter, be verified carefully when they reach the Admiralty.

2. It is probable that the plans for the sinking of the interned ships, were elaborated in Germany,

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and that Rear Admiral Von Reuter, in acting as he did, was but following the orders of his government, or, probably, of the German military party. This opinion is based on the orders given by Rear Admiral Von Reuter, June 17, 1919 (See Appendix F, to the Report of the commanding officer of the ships anchored at Scapa). The two first paragraphs of these orders should be read, it seems to me, as follows:-

1. On receiving this command, the Captains must make the necessary arrangements for the sinking of their ships, so that this may be accomplished as quickly as possible after the command has been given.

2. After disembarking the crews - (that is to say, the 2,200 men sent back to Germany June 17, 1919) - the preparations must be pushed as intensively as possible, etc. - - - - -

3. Another confirmation of the opinion that instructions for the sinking of the ships emanated from Germany, is furnished us by the fact that Lieutenant Steiner, in command of the division of German destroyers, informed Rear Admiral Prendergast, - as is mentioned in § 8 of his Report, June 23, 1919, No. 050/91 - "that they had held themselves in readiness throughout the past month, to sink their ships, and that only five minutes elapsed" between the receipt of the order to scuttle the ships, and its execution. (A fact which denotes careful preparation.)

4. In § 6 of the orders given by Rear Admiral Von Reuter, commanders of German vessels received orders to sink their ships if the English should attempt to seize them. In his instructions, Rear Admiral Von Reuter makes

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the statement that he intended to sink the ships only "if the enemy wished to seize them against the wishes of the Government." This statement, however, does not agree with that made by him on board the "REVENGE" (see paragraph 10 - Section VII - p. 13 of the Report by the commanding officer of the ships anchored at Scapa - quoted above), i.e. that he would have sunk the ships whether the British Admiral had been in port or not.

5. The conclusion which I have reached is, that orders were sent from Germany to the effect that the interned ships must be sunk, and under no circumstances, surrendered, and that the necessary arrangements were completed Wednesday, June 18, or later, when the men, who had embarked at Scapa the day before, were safely in Germany. Apparently, the plans for sinking and damaging the ships were known only to the officers, but, even had they been more widely spread, there would have been very little chance of their becoming known to the officers and men of the British fleet, by reason of the little communication allowed between the two fleets. Evidence of the ease with which the preparations for sinking the ships, were accomplished, is to be found in the Report of the commanding officer of the trawler C.D. No. 2, which was alongside the "EMDEN" at noon on the 21st; in his report he states that the officers were eating breakfast while the ship was sinking (paragraph 23- Section II - Report of the commanding officer) and that, up to the moment when the crew of the "EMDEN" left the ship at the stern, the sailors on the drifter had not remarked anything unusual.

In paragraph 27, Section II of the same Report, it is

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stated that the small steamer "NELLIE LAND" was alongside the "BAYERN", shipping supplies, when the "BAYERN" began to sink.

6. On Saturday, June 21, 1919, the first battle squadron was at sea, with my approval, and was finishing a target and torpedo-launching practice which had been delayed by bad weather. I had given orders that the practice should be finished by the end of the week.

It was doubtless the absence of the cruisers which determined the Admiral in his choice of the moment for action, but, in my opinion, this absence has nothing to do with the question as to whether or not it was the German Admiral who ordered the sinkings.

If the cruisers had been at anchor, it is probable that Rear Admiral von Reuter would have commanded the ships to be sunk during the night, as is proved by the two extracts of his orders, given later on; it is evident, moreover, that the sinking of the ships under those circumstances, would have been less quickly discovered, and that the arrival of the armed detachments would have been delayed longer.

The presence of the cruisers at anchor, would in no wise have disturbed the German officers, if they had decided to open the valves of the sea cocks; in fact, it is certain that this work was performed by the officers, and not by the men.

It is equally doubtful whether the presence of our ships would have had any effect on the number of losses.

In fact, the guard destroyer WESCOTT was powerless to save the "HINDENBURG", owing to the short time that it takes to sink a ship. The detachments of our cruisers sent to seize

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the German ships, doubtless would have arrived too late to keep them afloat; it is calculated that a ship of the "QUEEN ELIZABETH" type, for example, may be sunk in between twenty-five minutes and one hour from the time that the order is received; the "KAISER FRIEDRICH DER GROSSE" sank fifty minutes after the command was given by Rear Admiral Von Reuter (11.20 a.m. to 12.10). Even if a ship were emptied of water in half the time mentioned above, it would be too late to save it.

7. Nothing unusual was observed by the "VICTORIOUS", which was at anchor at the middle of the anchoring ground of the German destroyers in Gutter Sound, until after twelve o'clock noon, that is to say, three-quarters of an hour after the signal ordering the sinking of the ships, had been given by the "EMDEN".

8. In my telegrams 1509 and 1615, June 18, 1919, sent to the commanding officer at Scapa, I authorized the putting to sea of the first battle squadron, for practice, on June 21, 1919, as I did not consider, and do not consider now, that its presence at Scapa would have prevented the sinking of the German ships.

The usual guard was at anchor; it was composed of 7 trawlers and drifters, commanded by officers and manned by sailors of the regular service, and was under steam; and two destroyers which, either under steam, or at anchor, required only five minutes to be got under way.

I do not consider that there was any reason why Von Reuter's signal to the commander of the "NATION BALTIQUE" (mentioned § 5, Section VII of the commanding officer's Report) should have aroused the suspicions of the Vice Admiral of the

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first battle squadron, or have made it necessary to postpone the practice.

9. I agree with the Vice Admiral that there seemed to be no reason to fear that Admiral Von Reuter would authorize any violation of the terms of the Armistice. All the officers in command of the guard of the ships interned at Scapa, have reported that they did their best, - successfully, as a rule, - to carry out the instructions given them.

10. The orders given May 21, 1919, under No. 280/107, by Vice Admiral Fremantle, as commanding officer of the ships at Scapa, and approved by me, in regard to the taking possession of the German ships, if any violation of the terms of the armistice should occur, or if such a thing were suspected, have been sent already in the dispatch from the Atlantic fleet, June 22, 1919, No. 371/A.H. 0050- Appendix No. 6. The orders issued May 21 were replaced by orders dated June 19, 1919. (See Appendix "D" of the report by the Vice Admiral in command of the 1st battle squadron, dated June 24, No. 506/281.) I took the following measures to keep myself informed of every political circumstance which might possibly lead to a violation of the Armistice on the part of Rear Admiral Von Reuter.

On April 22, 1919 I requested the Admiralty, in my telegram No. 51, to keep me informed in regard to the political situation, so that I might be able, in case of necessity, to carry out the orders in regard to taking possession of the German ships.

On Friday, June 13, 1919, during a visit by me to the Admiralty, I asked the assistant chief of staff of the Navy, to let me have a daily report on the political situation, from

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Tuesday, June 17, so that I might be prepared to take measures if the necessity should arise. Their Lordships, however, were not able to give me any useful information, for one week.

June 21, 1919, by telegram No. 307 from the Atlantic fleet, I asked to be told the final fate reserved for the German ships, and the Board replied by telegram 639: "No information has been received and, to our knowledge, this question has not yet been considered at Paris- you will be informed as soon as we know anything."

Another telegram sent by their Lordships was received that same evening, saying that the naval measure already approved (the taking over of the German ships) would be put into effect as soon as the Armistice expired, if, before this time, the Germans had not decided to sign the Peace Treaty.

On receiving this information, my intention was to order the commanding officer at Scapa, to summon Rear Admiral Von Reuter in order to communicate to him, this decision and to inform him that he (Von Reuter) would be held responsible for the interned ships, until they had been turned over to the English.

I regret that I failed to inform the commanding officer of the telegram from the Admiralty, No. 573, June 17, 1919, announcing the extension of the time allowed for signing the Peace Terms, from Saturday 21 to Monday, June 23, 1919.

None of these communications, which, as a rule, reached me through the medium of the Press, were transmitted to Rear Admiral Von Reuter. I considered that it would be time enough to communicate with him when the ships were to be ta-



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ken over.

And, moreover, it is evident, from the orders given by Rear Admiral Von Reuter, that the ships would have been sunk at the first attempt to take possession of them.

11. My view of the situation during this week was that the ships being interned, we had no right to put armed guards on board them, or to take possession of them, as long as there was no reason to doubt the honor of Rear Admiral Von Reuter or to believe that he had lost his authority over the crews on the ships.

Events had showed that he exercised complete authority over these men, and I had no reason to doubt his good faith.

12. Rear Admiral Prendergast, in his capacity of commanding officer at noon, June 21, at the time of the scuttling of the German ships, acted promptly and energetically, and it is thanks to his zeal and to the resource which he showed, that it was possible to run aground the destroyers and light cruisers, and to save the "BADEN".

(Signed) C. E. MADEEN,  
Admiral.

Copy

The "REVENGE" at Scapa,

No. 506/281

June 24, 1919.

Sir:-

I have the honor to report to you on the sinking of the German fleet interned at Scapa.

1. Statement of facts.

At 12.30 o'clock, June 21, the first battle squadron, comprising the "SPENCER", the "SHAKESPEARE" and seven destroyers of the 2nd flotilla, put to sea for practice in tor-

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pedo attack, by the destroyers, and in the launching of long-range torpedoes, by the cruisers.

2. The attack by the destroyers had taken place and the destroyers were raising their torpedoes.

3. The 1st division of the 1st battle squadron ("REVENGE", "RAMILLIES", and "ROYAL SOVEREIGN") was 58° 33; N., 2° 29 W, 25 miles from the entrance of Scapa Flow, and the 2nd division ("RESOLUTION", "ROYAL OAK"), 10 miles to the south, both about to take their positions for the next bout.

4. In the roadstead were three coast-guard destroyers, two of which, the guard ships "WALPOLE" and "WESTCOTT", were under steam and were at their customary anchorage, that is to say, at the buoys D7 and J4 in the neighborhood of the German destroyers at the end of one of the lines of large ships.

5. Four guard trawlers were patrolling the German ships in accordance with my orders. They were the "CABALSIN", "CUSWOSIN", "RAMNA" and "CAERSIN". The drifter messengers "C.D.I." and "TRUSTON", and the commanding trawler "RECLUSE", were likewise near the German ships.

6. At 12:30 o'clock I received a wireless message from the "WESTCOTT" saying: "German cruiser gone to the bottom," followed shortly by a message from Rear Admiral Rob I. Pendergast C.B., commanding the Orkney and Shetland Islands, saying "German cruisers "KAISER FRIEDRICH" class, sunk. All the cruisers and destroyers are flying the German flag. Crews of the destroyers preparing to leave.

7. I stopped the practice immediately and headed under full steam for Scapa Flow. The "SPENCER" was or-

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dered to return, as quickly as possible, with 6 destroyers, to Gutter Sound, and to do all that was necessary. I gave instructions to demand the surrender of the German ships, to board them and, if necessary, to fire upon them. I kept two destroyers with me, so as to be prepared for emergencies.

8. The 2nd division of cruisers was ordered to return to the anchoring ground at full speed.

9. The 1st division dropped anchor at Scapa Flow at 2:30 p.m., the 2nd division at 4 p.m; the two divisions anchored near the German fleet.

10. While returning to the anchoring ground, the Rear Admiral commanding the Orkney and the Shetland Islands, was requested to send all available trawlers and drifters to the cruisers on their arrival; the marines were ready to land; three squads of armed guards on board each ship, were likewise in readiness, and the steam launches and launches were armed; orders were given as to the measures to be taken on arrival.

II. Measures Taken in Port Before the Arrival of the 1st Battle Squadron and the Destroyers.

The only sea-going ships remaining in port after the departure of the first battle squadron and the destroyers, were:

"SANDHURST".....Supply ship for destroyers.

"VEGA".....In poor condition- alongside the "SANDHURST".

"WALPOLE".....Guard ship for the German destroyers- under steam.

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"WESTCOTT".....Guard ship detailed to guard  
the German ships- under steam.

A certain number of trawlers and drifters armed by the first battle squadron.

2. Rear Admiral Prendergast, commanding the Orkney and Shetland Islands, reports that, at noon, the destroyer "WESCOTT" reported to him that a German cruiser was sinking; at the same moment, it was remarked by the "VICTORIOUS" that the interned vessels and destroyers, were flying the German flag and a red guidon, the meaning given to this latter by German officers being "engage in battle".

3. The Rear Admiral immediately summoned all the small craft in the vicinity of the "Victorious". On their arrival, some were sent to Flow (in conformance with a wireless message sent by me) to await the arrival of the first battle squadron ; others were sent to assist in saving the German ships; still others were sent to pick up the Germans who were leaving their ships.

4. The Rear Admiral decided rightly that it was useless to lose time in trying to save the large German ships; he concentrated all his efforts on saving the destroyers.

5. The Admiralty officer of the Port received an order to slip the chains of the destroyers and to run them aground. Considerable trouble was experienced in slipping the chains which were turned several times about the bittes and lashed above, while the coupling pins had been hammered in such a way that it was impossible to remove them.

6. In spite of all, the efforts of the flotilla, under the direction of the Rear Admiral, were crowned with the greatest success; they ran aground not less than 13 Ger-

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man destroyers. The Rear Admiral's tugboats also slipped the chain of the "BREMSE" and assisted in towing her; the same was done with the "EMDEN", and an unsuccessful attempt was made to tow the "DRESDEN".

7. The commanding officer of the "SANDHURST" who, after the departure of the first battle squadron and of the destroyers, became the commanding officer at Scapa, decided to make use of the troops, and gave them the following emergency orders:

- (a) To carry the Germans back to their ships.
- (b) Prevent them from disembarking in large numbers.
- (c) If possible, to prevent the ships from sinking.
- (d) To run aground such ships as could not be kept afloat.

8. As it seemed that nothing much could be done with the large ships, he concentrated his attention on the destroyers.

9. A squad was sent from the "SANDHURST" to try to save the destroyers (12); the result was: four sunk, seven run ashore and one kept afloat.

10. The "SANDHURST" took on board the German prisoners from the destroyers, while waiting to transfer them to cruisers.

11. All available officers on the "SANDHURST" were sent, in a small boat, to force the Germans in the lifeboats, to return to their ships. This measure, which, in certain cases, was enforced by fire being directed on the boats which would not obey orders, was extremely efficacious and, without doubt, delayed the sinking of several destroyers, thus making it possible to cut their cables and run them aground.

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12. On seeing what was happening, the "WALPOLE" left its mooring buoy. After forcing the crews of the German destroyers, by rifle fire, to return to their ships, and sending squads on board the six German destroyers to compel the crews to close the hatches, etc., it approached the "NURNBERG", slipped her cable and towed her ashore.

13. At 12:05, the "WESTCOTT" observed that the "KAISER FRIEDRICH DER GROSSE" was beginning to list, informed me by wireless, weighed anchor and went off towards Gutter Sound to report to the "VICTORIOUS".

When she returned to the anchoring ground of the large ships, squads were sent on board two German destroyers and succeeded in running them ashore before they sank.

14. Seeing that of all the battle cruisers, the "HINDENBURG" probably would remain afloat the longest, the commanding officer boarded her with a squad which was ordered to do everything possible to prevent her from sinking.

15. The squad in question was able to close several water-tight doors. As it was impossible to slip the chains (the 2 anchors being moored) they were cut by means of charges of two and a quarter litres of powder placed on each chain just above the water line.

The ship was taken in tow, but there was not time to run her ashore before she sank, and settled in 11 fathoms of water.

16. Although the "WESCOTT" was quick in reporting to me and to the Rear Admiral commanding the Ork-

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ney and Shetland Islands, and her crew did good work on board the "HINDENBURG", it is to be regretted, since it was upon this vessel that the immediate responsibility of guarding the German ships, rested, that her commanding officer did not follow the same methods as at Gutter Sound, that he did not force the Germans, by means of rifle fire, to return to their ships, and that he did not pick up or sink the boats. There was a very strict order that under no circumstances, could the Germans launch a boat without permission; this order was well known and was enforced.

17. The two drifters "RAMNA" and "TRUSTON" with a crew taken from the flotilla of destroyers and commanded respectively by a sub-lieutenant and a midshipman, rendered excellent service in driving back the crews of the German destroyers to their ships, by means of rifle fire, and, later, in helping to cut the cables of the German destroyers.

18. The "VEGA" weighed anchor at 12:45 p.m., came alongside two German destroyers, placed squads on board them, and succeeded in running ashore another before it sank. In consequence of a wrong movement of her engines, she collided with a destroyer, and her bow was seriously damaged.

19. The guard trawler "CUDWOSIN" (with a crew taken from the "RAMILLIES"), hailed the captain of the "KONIG ALBERT" as his men were leaving the ship in boats, and ordered him to make them return, threatening to fire if this command were not obeyed. Unfortunately, the officer in command on the "CUDWOSIN" did not carry out his threat when the boats, drawing away, raised the white flag.

20. The guard trawler "CABALSIN" (with a crew

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taken from the "ROYAL OAK"), observed, at 11:30 a.m. a boat being launched from the "FRIEDRICH DER GROSSE". She sent a vedette to inform the guard destroyer. She then opened fire on the boats from the "BAYERN" and ordered them to return to their ship. The commanding officer on the "CABALSIN" also opened fire on the "MARKGRAF", which was attempting to lower a steam launch, and on the boats belonging to several other vessels. He reports that as the ships were about to sink, his fire had no effect.

21. The trawler "CLONSIN" (with a crew from the "RESOLUTION") was on guard off shore, but gave able assistance to the "WALPOLE" by delaying the sinking of the "NURNBERG" and slipping her cable.

22. The trawler "CAERSIN" (manned by the crew of the "REVENGE") had on board Mr. Bernard Gribble R. A.; I was ordered to give him every facility for drawing. At noon, this trawler was abreast of the "BADEN" and while awaiting the arrival of the guard trawler, she prevented the lowering of the "BADEN'S" boats. She then took in tow four boats belonging to the "FRANKFURT", forced the men in them to return to their ship, and cutting the moorings, set the boats adrift. To this remarkable achievement, is due the delay in the sinking of the "FRANKFURT", in consequence of which it was possible to run her ashore.

23. At noon, the trawler "C.D.2" (with a crew from the "RAMILLIES") was alongside the "EMDEN" superintending the taking off of provisions meant for the officers who were going on board the "DOLLART". It is stated by the commanding officer that the majority of the officers were at table, when



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the men ran forward crying that the ship was sinking. The German Rear Admiral and his flag captain attempted to board the trawler, but they were ordered to return to their own ship. The commanding officer of the "C.D.2" stayed by the "EMDEN", until the arrival of the "SHAKESPEARE". Evidently, there was a panic on the "EMDEN"; she was abandoned in great haste and her sinking was much less efficiently accomplished than was the case with the majority of the other ships. It is possible that this was due to the presence of three British trawlers alongside.

24. The drifter "RECLUSE" (with a crew from the "RAMILLIES") was also alongside the "EMDEN" (carrying orders) and took her crew on board.

25. The drifter "C.D. 1" (with a crew from the "ROYAL OAK"), was alongside in the capacity of a fleet messenger. The German Rear Admiral and his staff boarded her and were taken to Houten Bay and later put on board the "REVENGE".

26. The trawler "CAERSIN" (with a crew from the "ROYAL OAK") was some distance away; she picked up the Germans in the boats.

27. The trawler "NELLIE LAND", with a fatigue party of three men from the "ROYAL OAK", commanded by a master gunner, was employed in taking off supplies from the "BAYERN" to be transferred to the German transport. The gunner proved to possess intelligence and initiative, and took command of the trawler, boarded the "KRONPRINZ WILHELM" and notified her commander that he would open fire if any attempt was made to leave the ship; he then took up a position between the "KRONPRINZ WILHELM" and the "MARKGRAF" and opened

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fire on all Germans who attempted to escape in boats. He took prisoner more than 100 Germans and put them in the hold of the trawler until such time as he could transfer them to a cruiser.

28. The trawler "CLASSIN" (with a crew from the "REVENGE") which was some distance away, after having slipped the cable of the "DRESDEN", preparatory to taking her in tow (the "DRESDEN" sank before this could be done) gave able assistance in running aground the "BREMSE" and the "FRANKFURT".

29. The trawler "COALSIN" (with a crew from the "ROYAL SOVEREIGN") was coaling in Gutter Sound, and assisted in slipping the cables of the destroyers and towing them ashore.

30. The measures taken by the three destroyers and the trawlers with their crews, were of the greatest help; it is owing to the initiative and decision of their officers, who so quickly grasped the situation and fired on the German boats, that it was possible to save the "BADEN", the "FRANKFURT" and the "NURNBERG". The majority of the ships being in the responsible position of guard ships, acted along the same lines; among these, there were some which were a considerable distance from the German ships when the trouble began, and the boats (all of which were flying white flags) were so far away as to make it impossible to take back each one to the ship to which it belonged. All the ships, however, gave effective assistance in surrounding the German boats, some of which headed towards Kukwall, and in preventing disembarkment.

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III. Measures Taken by the Battle Squadron on its Arrival.

I. The measures taken on arrival were as follows:-

(1) Three armed detachments were sent by each ship of the first division, on different trawlers. The detachments from the "REVENGE" were ordered to give their attention to the German ships to the S. W., those from the "RAMILLIES", to the center, those from the "ROYAL SOVEREIGN", to the extreme N. E. The order given to the armed detachments was to board every ship which it might be possible to save, and to take every measure to prevent its sinking.

On their arrival, the "RESOLUTION" and the "ROYAL OAK" were ordered to send salvage squads to the "BADEN" and the "EMDEN", as there seemed to be a possibility of saving these two ships.

(2) All detachments of marines were sent ashore, and were stationed at different points along the coast in the vicinity of the German ships and destroyers. They were ordered to patrol the coast, to seize all Germans who were able to land, and to reassure the local population.

(3) All steamships and launches which were not employed in landing the marines, were sent to seize the German boats and to make prisoners of the occupants.

(4) A destroyer was sent to the entrance of Hoxa so that no German craft could leave the port.

(5) Aeroplanes were sent to patrol the coast, and to report any German boat which might approach unob-

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served by the small British craft.

2. At the time of my arrival (at 2:30 p.m.), the "BADEN", the "MARKGRAF", the "BRUMMER" and the "FRANKFURT" were still afloat, though sinking perceptibly. Not a German flag was flying. A large number of German boats, filled with officers and men, and flying the white flag, apparently were awaiting our arrival. Destroyers, tugboats and trawlers were making every effort to slip the cables of the light cruisers and run them ashore. Drifters and other small steamships, were taking on board officers and men from the boats.

The "DERFFLINGER" sank at 2:45 p.m.

3. The detachments which I had ordered to make preparations on board for towing, left the ships rapidly.

4. The detachments of marines found no Germans on shore and, after patrolling the coast, returned to their ships at between 8 p.m. and midnight.

5. The prisoners already in the small craft, and those who had been picked up by the small boats belonging to the squadron, were assembled on board the cruisers, to the number of about 1,820, and the following commands were issued in regard to them:

A.C., 1st B.S., to 1st B.S., and captain (D),  
1825, June 21, 1919.

"I consider that by their act of treachery, the German prisoners of war have renounced all right to treatment other than that dictated by common humanity. They should be treated with the greatest severity. The officers will receive the same treatment as the men, except that they will be kept separate from the latter. Every officer or man who speaks to a British officer, must salute him. The men will

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stand at attention when passed in review by a British officer, or when an officer inspects their quarters. British inspection officers will be accompanied by a sufficiently strong guard to insure the carrying out of these orders. Prisoners and their belongings will be carefully searched, and they will be allowed to keep only strictly personal effects.

The prisoners will remain on board the boats for the night.

A.C. 1st B.S. to 1st B.S. 2250

June 21, 1919.

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Dispatch from the First Battle Squadron

N.P. 506/281

June 24, 1919.

"The commanders, all engineer officers and men, on the "BADEN", the "EMDEN", the "FRANKFURT" and the "NURNBERG", will be placed on board the "RESOLUTION" before departure."

This last order was given for the reason that it was my intention to leave the "RESOLUTION" at Scapa in charge of the "BADEN" and the light cruisers which had been run ashore, while the rest of the squadron headed for Cromarty, there to land the prisoners.

6. Following are the measures taken by those of the armed guards furnished by the vessels of the 1st division which rendered such efficient service.

"REVENGE"

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A Squad from the "WESTCOTT" on board the "HINDENBURG" tried to close the doors and scuppers, but with little success; the chains were cut by using 2½ pound charges, and the "WESTCOTT" started to tow the ship, but the water came in through the scuppers of the maindeck and the vessel sank at 4:15 p.m., shortly after the arrival of the detachment from the "REVENGE".

On the "MARKGRAF" - A squad from the "VECTIS" on board this vessel, did not succeed in slipping or in cutting her chains, although she had been taken in tow. A squad from the "REVENGE" was unable to do much, but remained on board until the upper deck was under water, and the ship began to sink.

She sank at 4:30 p.m.

Reinforcement squads from other ships were sent to the "BADEN" and to the "EMDEN".

"ROYAL SOVEREIGN".

On the "FRANKFURT". - This ship was towed by the "WESSEX", a tugboat and a trawler, her chains having been slipped, and some officers and men from the "WESSEX" were on board, as well as some German officers and men; the valves were found to be fixed so that they could not be closed, the rods of these valves had been cut, the rubber removed from the hatches and scuppers, the bolts on the watertight doors, damaged, and the ladders had been removed, and a great deal of water was coming in. The ship was towed to shore and run aground in 3½ fathoms of water before it sank.

Reinforcement squads were sent from other ships to the "MARKGRAF" and to the "BADEN".

"ROYAL OAK"

The "NURNBERG" was run aground, and all her engine rooms

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and three out of four of her fire rooms, were found to be full of water. Everything possible was closed, such as doors, hatches and scuppers, a number of leaks were stopped, and the anchor was lowered to insure the safety of the ship.

### "RAMILLIES"

The "BADEN". - This ship was found to be filling rapidly; all watertight doors and scuppers were open, but the lighting system was still working. She was searched from top to bottom. A certain number of openings and valves leading to the engine and the boilers, were closed, as well as all watertight doors, hatches and scuppers. The Diesel dynamos were kept running. Great dexterity and quickness was shown in accomplishing this task, the result being that the ship was saved.

Reinforcement squads from other ships were sent to the "MARKGRAF".

---oOo---

Dispatch from the 1st Battle Squadron No. 506/281,  
June 24, 1919.

### IV. - Evolutions of the destroyers after their Arrival.

As has already been said, the "SPENSER" and the "SHAKESPEARE", accompanied by the seven destroyers "VEDETTE", "WESTMINSTER", "WINCHELSEA", "VECTIS", "VESPER", "VENETIA" and "WESSEX" were at sea with the first battle squadron.

2. This force arrived from Gutter Sound towards 2 p.m; of the fifty enemy destroyers, a certain number had sunk,

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some were still afloat, others had been taken in tow by trawlers or steam launches, and still others had already run aground.

3. Summary of the reports of some of the destroyers which gave efficient service:

The "SPENSER", coming alongside the "S.132" and "V.43", found them about to sink; the commander of the group was summoned, and was informed categorically that he and his officers would be held responsible if any one of the ships should sink. In consequence, the commander gave orders to stop the leaks and to put the "S.132" under steam. The "S.132" was saved, but eventually the "V.43" had to be run aground.

The "SHAKESPEARE", observing that the "EMDEN" was less low in the water than the other ships, went alongside her. The water reached the level of the floor plates of the engine room and stokeholes. She closed two openings in the engine room, as well as all the watertight doors, cut the chain and, with the assistance of a tugboat and a trawler, towed the vessel to shore.

The "VECTIS" took the "MARKGRAF" in tow. Though the cable reliever had been removed and the choking frame opened, the chain would not run out. The ship was kept in tow for half an hour, but the chain was not cut in time, and the attempt to run the ship aground before it could sink, was unsuccessful.

The "Winchelsea" came alongside the "G.92" and towed it ashore.

The "VENETIA" came alongside the "BREMEN", slipped her cable, took her in tow and, with the help of two tug-



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boats, ran her aground. The "BREMEN" capsized almost immediately, and remained almost bottom up.

The "ESSEX" went alongside the "FRANKFURT": fourteen German officers and sailors were found on board. They were flying a white flag. The "WESSEX" immediately took the "FRANKFURT" in tow and, with the help of a detachment from the "ROYAL SOVEREIGN" for maneuvering, and of the trawler "CLASSIN", for towing, succeeded in running the "FRANKFURT" aground in four fathoms of water in the bay of Smoogroo(?).

### V. Reasons why the First Battle Squadron was at sea.

On Thursday, June 9, acting on the generous orders of the Admiral Commander in Chief of the Atlantic and the Home Fleets, I planned for a practice for the 1st battle squadron in long distance launching of torpedoes. I had sent a copy of my orders in regard to this practice, to the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic and Home fleets, on June 17, and, in addition, I asked his approval by message No. 1015, June 18.

Message from the Admiral commanding the 1st battle squadron to the Admiral Commander in Chief, No. 1015, June 18:

"Permission asked to practice long distance torpedo launching, tomorrow, Thursday, or the first day convenient."

By messages No. 1509 and 1615, June 18, the Admiral Commander in Chief, gave his consent, and, in the latter of these messages, ordered me to finish the practice by Saturday, June 21, if possible.

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Message from the Admiral Commander in Chief to the Admiral in command of the 1st battle squadron, No. 1509, June 18:

"I approve your message No. 1015".

Message from the Admiral Commander in Chief to the Admiral commanding the 1st battle squadron, No. 1615, June 18:

"Your message No. 1044 (?) approved. If possible finish practice this week.

2. This practice could not be begun on Thursday, June 19, owing to the weather.

Report was made to the Admiral Commander in Chief, by message 0930, the same date.

Message from the Admiral in command of the 1st battle squadron to the Admiral Commander in Chief, No. 0930, June 19.

"Referring to my message No. 1615, June 18. Torpedo practice impossible owing to the weather."

3. On Friday, June 20, the weather was still bad. Report was made to the Admiral Commander in Chief by message No. 1700, same date.

Message from the Admiral in command of the 1st battle squadron to the Admiral Commander in Chief, No. 1700, June 20:

"Owing to weather, impossible for the squadron to have torpedo practice. I intend to start the practice tomorrow, Saturday, but not on Monday."

This last was inspired by the fact that, though no official notice had been received in regard to the date and hour of the ending of the armistice, I knew, through the press, that the time allowed Germany for signing the Peace

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treaty might be extended until Monday, June 23, nineteen hours.

4. No reply was returned to this last message and none was expected, for the reason that the instructions of the Admiral Commander in Chief contained in message No. 1615, June 18 (see paragraph I), constituted sufficient authority for carrying on the practice, - on condition that it was finished by the end of the week, that is to say, Saturday 21.

5. The weather being favorable on Saturday, the 1st battle squadron and 9 destroyers left the base at 9 a.m. to practice off Point Duncansby.

---oOo---

VI. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

Since being put in charge of the German ships on May 18, I was given no reason to criticize the conduct of the officers and men on board these ships, with the exceptions mentioned below.

2. All orders were transmitted by Captain S. G. Fraser D.S. O.R.N. of my staff, to Rear Admiral Von Reuter, who obeyed them promptly.

3. The departure and arrival of the messenger, the transfer of chaplains, doctors and invalids, the unloading of the German supply ship, the sending home of about 2200 men of all ranks, the replenishing of coal ships, water ships, etc., all this was accomplished without friction, and my orders were followed strictly.

4. Although, as a rule, no communication was al-

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lowed between the German ships, it is evident that the indispensable operations enumerated in the preceding paragraph, necessitated a certain amount of direct, or indirect communication between Admiral Von Reuter and the interned ships. Also, it was necessary, from time to time, that his staff officers should visit the other ships, in order to make arrangements for sending home the 2200 officers and men, and these visits took place with my consent, which had to be given each time.

5. The only exception to the general good behavior of the German officers and men, happened on May 31, the anniversary of the Jutland battle. On this occasion the "SEYDLITZ", the "MOLTKE" and the greater number of destroyers, hoisted the German colors and the red flag. I gave orders that no German flag, or red flag, visible outside the ship, should be raised, and I stated that no dressing of the ships was allowed. These orders were carried out after a great display had been made, but certain destroyers set off some Very rockets at midnight.

6. I had no fear that any serious violation of the armistice would occur before the last moments preceding the signing of the treaty by the German representatives.

7. I greatly feared, however, that damage would be done to the German ships in the following contingencies:

(1) If the treaty were signed during the interval of time elapsing between the signing of the treaty and the sending home of the German officers and men, or

(2) If the treaty were not signed before I could make sure of the delivery of the ships.

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8. In my dispatch No. 280/112, June 16, I had submitted my plans to the Commander in Chief who approved them in his telegram 1550, June 19, and I gave orders to have them carried out.

9. I wish to say that the word "may" (paragraph 2, proceeding "a" of Report No. 280/107, June 19, 1919, from the 1st battle squadron), after my suggestion had been approved by the Commander in Chief, had been changed verbally to "will" at a meeting which was attended also by Rear Admiral Hon. V. A. Stanley, C.B., M.V.O., and all the superior officers.

10. It may be seen, on referring to the orders of Rear Admiral Von Reuter, which were seized on board the "EMDEN", that my presentiments in regard to his conduct under normal circumstances, were justified.

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VII. Rear Admiral Von Reuter's Motives

On his arrival on board ship, to give himself up as my prisoner, Von Reuter convinced me that the responsibility for the occurrences which had just taken place, rested with him entirely, and that his officers and men had no part in it.

2. June 13, Rear Admiral Von Reuter had asked to be allowed to send a telegram to Germany, in which he asked to be relieved of his office, on account of ill health. A medical certificate was attached, stating that the Rear Admiral was suffering from "very serious digestive trouble," presupposing the existence of an internal malady; from pains in the intestines, almost constant insomnia, very severe

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headaches and daily vertigo, - in fact, that his nervous system was severely shattered.

3. From what I had observed personally, and knew, of the existence of Rear Admiral Von Reuter, I believed that his request to be relieved was both just and desirable. In consequence, I reported favorably on his request to the Commander in Chief, who gave his consent June 15. The Rear Admiral was told that his telegram had gone.

4. The appearance of ill-health shown by Rear Admiral Von Reuter, the extreme nervousness of his manner while he was a prisoner on board the "REVENGE", confirmed the report of the doctor.

5. After the departure of the first battle squadron on the morning of June 21, the translation of a message was brought to me, which had arrived on board while the "REVENGE" was raising anchor; this message was from Von Reuter.

He requested the immediate sending of a message of the greatest importance, a message which purported to be as follows:

To the Minister of Imperial Defense,  
Chief of the Admiralty, Chief of the Baltic Station, Chief of the North Sea Station.

June 21.

"I noticed today in the English papers that in the German counter-propositions the Government suggests employing the interned ships for commercial purposes. While admitting the acuteness of economical distress, my sentiments of patriotism make it impossible for me to agree to such

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treatment being inflicted upon the interned German fleet. I am certain that this feeling is shared by all the officers of the squadron. Therefore, I ask a revision of the peace terms, or if this cannot be done, that we, officers and functionaries, may be relieved before the ships are delivered."

Signed: REAR ADMIRAL VON REUTER.

6. Believing that this communication was of sufficient importance to necessitate its being sent to the Commander in Chief, and being at that moment absorbed in the maneuvers of the 1st battle squadron and the destroyers during the torpedo launching practice, I decided to drop the matter until my return to port. It must be said, however, that the above message was dated June 21, and that it must have been written only a few hours before the decision was made, and the order given, to sink the ships.

7. By examining the copy of the orders issued by the Rear Admiral, dated June 17, it will be seen that his first intention was to sink the ships only "if the enemy wished to take possession of them without the consent of our Government. If, in the treaty, our Government agrees to surrender the ships, we will do so, to the eternal shame of those who have placed us in such a position."

8. According to the log of the "BADEN", it is evident that no warning signal was given, and that the exact order for the sinking of the ships (an order which, because of the wide area over which the ships were spread, and the many islands interposed, must have taken considerable time to reach all of them) was given at 11:20 a.m.

Letter No. 505/281 from the first battle squadron, June

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24, 1919.

9. The opinion that the order was entirely unexpected is supported by the fact that no acts of sabotage were committed other than those necessary to assure the rapid sinking of the ships; also by the state of the officers' cabins and the men's quarters, where the trunks and valises had been packed with great haste, and by the fact that on some of the ships the noonday meal remained intact on the tables.

10. When he was prisoner on board the "REVENGE", the Rear Admiral asked to see the interpreter to whom he made the following statement:

He said that he failed to understand why Admiral Fremantle should consider the sinking of the ships as an act of perfidy, since, when he committed the act, he was under the impression that the armistice had expired.

He had written the letter the day before, which was received Saturday morning, - after having read in an English newspaper that, in the German counter-propositions, the German Government expressed a wish to use the interned ships for business purposes (merchandise).

On Saturday morning he had read in another English newspaper that the Allies had rejected the counter-propositions and, therefore, that the original naval clauses would not be changed. In consequence, not being informed of the extension of time allowed for the signing of the peace terms, and believing that the armistice had expired, he had given the order to sink the ships.

At the beginning of hostilities he had ordered that no German warship should ever be surrendered to the enemy.

He informed Admiral Fremantle that he, Von Reuter,



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could not understand why the sinking of the ships should be characterized as perfidious, and he stated that he considered that he should have been informed of the extension of the time granted to Germany for signing the treaty.

He declared that during his command of the interned ships, he had been consistently fair and honest, and that he had been treated in like manner.

He would have sunk the ships whether the Admiral had been in port, or not.

(Admiral Von Reuter never received from me any communication in regard to the date of the expiration of the armistice, or bearing, in a general way, on the terms of the Peace Treaty).

11. In view of the evidence given below, my opinion is that Rear Admiral Von Reuter's decision was taken in haste, and that he was influenced by two extraordinary errors, which, to my knowledge, were entirely unjustified:

(a) that his Government intended to use the interned ships for business purposes.

(b) that the armistice had expired.

I am of the opinion that, while being mentally responsible for his act, the consequences of which the officers and men under him and his Government must suffer from eventually, the Rear Admiral was not in a normal state of health, and that his conduct was influenced by his physical condition.

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VIII Losses

The German losses, as far as can be computed, consisted of two officers and six men killed, five men wounded.

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IX. Proposals.

I propose, under separate cover, to submit to you the names of certain officers and sailors who distinguished themselves by their services during the events forming the subject of this report.

I have the honor to be

Your obedient servant,

Signed: SYDNEY R. FREMANTLE

Vice Admiral in Command of the first battle squadron, chief of the naval units at Scapa.

Addresses:

The Secretary of the Admiralty.

The Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet and the "Home Fleet",

On board the "QUEEN ELIZABETH."

---oOo---

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Copy of the Translation

-----  
Commander of the interned squadron

B Nr. P. 40.

June 18.

( Transmitted ) by a personnel officer

A...F.d.T.(12 copies).

1. At the signal given to all the captains, (sic group first paragraph Confirm Chief I.V).

Sabotage on the ships must begin at once. Fires (under the boilers) must be extinguished, turbines put out of service, auxiliary apparatus, and searchlights destroyed; most important of all, the mechanism of the cannons and torpedo tubes must be destroyed.

2. To be left intact: two boilers, one dynamo, Diesel dynamo, one searchlight, the apparatus for launching life-boats, the windlass, the rudder and life-saving apparatus.

The apparatus mentioned in § 2 must not be destroyed until the signal is given.

3. Do not attract outside attention, and when communicating with trawlers do not exchange articles belonging to the government, as this might attract attention.

4. This document must be taken in charge immediately by the captain who will place it under key. It must not fall into the hands of the enemy.

Signed: Von Reuter.

Receipt of P. 40 (12 copies) to be acknowledged immediately.

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Translation.

Chief of the interned squadron

            
            
            
B.Nr.P. 39.

June 17, 1919.

To be sent by personnel officer.

To the Commander:

Each commander will make the necessary preparations for sinking his ship in such manner that, after he receives his orders, it maybe sunk as rapidly as possible.

2. Preparations will be completed after the crews have been removed. The commanders will decide for themselves how far certain sailors, chosen from the crews, may be trusted to help, and, also, with the knowledge of our intentions, without danger of their betraying them in any way. - for example, by revealing them to the English.

3. The following preparatory measures will be taken:

Leave open, in such a way that they cannot be closed again, all doors and interior hatches, such as communication doors, store room doors, and bulkhead doors, hatchways, ports, ventilators, and scuppers.

According to the judgment of each commander, the following measures may be added: devices making possible the quick opening of torpedo tubes, condensers, sluices, and communicating valves and the flooding of the main pipes.

4. Life-boats. - If possible, only one boat for carrying the crew, will be kept in readiness for lowering. A white flag will be put into the boat. On leaving the ship, the boats containing the men, will head towards land, taking the shortest route; they will be under the orders of their officers.

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5. The sinking of the ships will not take place except:-

(a) In the event of armed intervention on the part of the English.

(b) On receipt of special orders given by me.

6. Referring to 5 - a:

Officers must make a careful study of the measures to be taken to insure the sinking of their ships in case the English should attempt to take these ships by surprise.

A request to surrender should be considered as capture by force, and should be answered by sinking the ships.

7. In reference to 5 - b:

Orders may be given:

(a) to sink the ship immediately.

(b) or to sink the ship at a given hour.

8. Signals. For immediate sinking, the following signal will be given:

To all commanders and to the file leader of the torpedo boats.

Paragraph II, dated today.

Chief of the interned squadron.

The signal will be transmitted by every method available.

The sinking of the ships will commence immediately.

The following signal will be given for sinking the ships at a given hour (7b):

To all commanders and to the chief of file of the torpedo boats

Paragraph 0913" acknowledge receipt"

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Chief of the interned squadron.

In this visual signal, the two first numbers indicate the date (that is to say the 9) and the two last, the hour at which the sinking of the ships is to commence.

The time will be rated from noon to noon (astronomically).

9. Acknowledgement of receipt. - The acknowledgement of receipt of the visual signal will be as follows:

To the Chief of the interned squadron:

Paragraph of the visual signal received,

The Commanding Officer.

10. As the acceptance, or the non-acceptance, of the peace terms and the reopening of hostilities, may be decided at any moment, we are approaching an especially critical time.

From June 18, a constant vigilance, by day and night, will be necessary, in order to watch, not only for anything unusual in the attitude of the English, but also for signals from the "EMDEN". As it is not possible to place absolute confidence in the men, the officers themselves must take the necessary watches.

11. It is my intention to sink the ships only in the event of the enemy attempting to take possession of them without the consent of our Government. If our Government agrees to surrender the ships, in accordance with the peace terms, the ships will be delivered, to the everlasting shame of those who have placed us in this position.

12. The commanding officers will keep this document under lock and key; it must not fall into the hands

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of the enemy.

Signed: VON REUTER.

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Appendix

NOTE

The following translation of a letter from Rear Admiral Trotha to Rear Admiral Von Reuter, dated May 9, 1919, was found, during the work of rescue, on the German ship "EMDEN"; it is on the same lines as the two preceding letters of the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet and of the Vice Admiral commanding the 1st battle squadron.

Translation of a letter from Rear Admiral Trotha.

Chief of the Admiralty, to Rear Admiral Von Reuter,  
Scapa Flow (May 9, 1919).

Chief of the Admiralty,

No. A.III 5332

Berlin, May 9, 1919.

Very Secret.

You have expressed several times to Commander Stapenhorst the desire of the interned ships (Intermierungs Verband) to be informed concerning their fate and of the date on which their internment would probably end.

The fate of these ships, which form the most valuable part of our fleet, will be decided, in all probability, in the preliminary peace negotiations now under way.

According to the press and to the statements made

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in the House of Lords, it appears that our enemies intend to deprive us of all interned ships on the conclusion of peace; they hesitate between destroying them, or dividing them among themselves. The English, of course, raise objections to this second course.

These hostile intentions are contrary to the rights of ownership - a right which, until now, has been undisputed, - of the Germans, to these ships; we consented to the internment of these ships when the armistice was concluded, only because we were obliged to agree to an appreciable decrease of the offensive power of the German fleet, for the duration of the armistice.

This interpretation, openly stated, was not contradicted by the enemy when the armistice was concluded or when it was extended. Moreover, we referred to this interpretation when we protested, February 1919, against the unjustifiable internment in this enemy port. We remarked that it was contrary to the terms of the armistice, and requested that the ships be transferred to a neutral port. This protest remained unanswered.

You may rest assured that it will be the chief duty of our naval delegates to Versailles, to safeguard the future of our interned ships in every possible way, and to arrive at a solution which will be in accord with our traditions and our incontestable rights. The first condition will be that the ships shall remain German and that their fate, whatever may happen under the stress of the political situation, shall not be decided without our having a voice in the matter; we must make the decision ourselves, and the surrender of the ships in the future, is out of the question. We must hope that



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these just demands will take the place which they should have in our political attitude when considering integrally the question of peace.

I ask you, in as far as you are able to do so, to be so good as to express to the officers and crews of the interned ships, the satisfaction that it is to me to know that they, on their side, so ardently, share our natural hope that the interned ships will remain under the German flag; and will you please let them know of our wish that our just cause may triumph. These sentiments will be of assistance to the German delegates at the Peace Conference. The fate of the entire navy depends on the result of their efforts; we must hope that they will be able to put an end to this internment which, owing to the fact that our enemies have not kept their word, has become so cruel, and the suffering and trials of which are deplored by our entire navy; all honor is given to our interned crews.

To the Commander in Chief of the interned ships

Rear Admiral Von Reuter

Scapa Flow.

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Finis

